A MARSHALL CAVENDISH COLLECTION 28 IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

CYBER CHALLENGE IN THE NEXT DIMENSION

28 Zenon, Laser Lancer

In the clutches of the creature of light

Julek Heller

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In the twenty-eighth sector

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Incapable of moving, Richard stared in horror at the splashes of acid on his arm. His protective metal skin was already beginning to sizzle and yellow blisters were forming on its surface. His armour was disintegrating before his eyes. Richard desperately looked towards Robo.

"Hydronomizers," Robo explained in his monotone voice. "Subterranean land guardians. Expel concentrated acid at intruders. Immediate application of alkali required to neutralize acidic action."

"Where do we find alkali?" Richard gasped in exasperation.

"Ammonia rain. Collects in pools on landscape," replied the robot.

Richard looked towards Robo, who was also in desperate trouble. Evil looking black smoke was belching from his metallic shell. It was then that he remembered the foul-smelling pools of liquid that were scattered everywhere over the landscape.

"Quick! Move to the ammonia pools!" Richard cried.

They made it just in time. Scooping up the pungent ammonia in his cupped hands, Richard doused it over his burns and then poured some over the robot. The sizzling intensified and then died away altogether. Richard looked down at his arm. The only reminder of his ordeal was a puckered scar on his armour.

IRREPARABLE DAMAGE

Robo, however, had not fared so well. A small drop of acid had seeped through the robot's metal casing. It had been neutralized by the ammonia but the damage had been done. Somewhere within his delicate circuitry, a vital component had been damaged.

"System check reveals malfunction," Robo reported. "Damage to memory banks."

"How bad?" Richard asked in dismay.

"Impossible to compute extent. Suggest moving away from this area as soon as possible. Top priority."

With Robo leading, the pair moved swiftly away from the Hydronomizers. As he walked, Richard noticed that there was a new message on Robo's binary panel. He quickly translated it.

It was not long before the landscape once more began to change. In a surreal sandscape of white, powdery, plastic dust, the dour monotony was only broken by the occasional presence of an enormous rocky spike. These razor sharp, jagged hulks sprouted from the ground at random and reached towards an oppressive, windswept sky as if attempting to desperately escape the grip of the forbidding terrain.

Laser Spear

Richard shivered and suddenly felt homesick for the Ancestral World and all it strange inhabitants. Anything would be better than being stuck in this uncompromising and alien place.

Out of curiosity, Richard approached one of the strange spikes. He had barely moved three paces when a flash of white light filled his vision and the dust in front of him melted. He stood still in amazement.

From behind the rocky spike a brightly-lit humanoid figure emerged. Richard stared in amazement as it moved its head around, searching for its prey. In its right hand it held a sharp spear, which appeared to be made from pure light.

"Zenon, laser lancer," said Robo from somewhere behind him, "Light creature reacts to movement. Advise immobility."

"Do you mean keep still?" Richard said.

The question was answered by Zenon, who launched a deadly laser spear right at Richard's cowering form.

The laser spear missed Richard by a hair's breadth.

"Remain immobile!" Robo repeated his command. "Will create diversion to make you safe. Move to nearby rock formation when Zenon's attention is distracted."

Moment of reflection

Watching Robo intently, Richard did as he was instructed. The robot moved forward and Zenon immediately spotted him. As more laser spears were launched, Richard leapt for the shelter of the rock. He huddled against its blackened, cold surface. Moments later Robo joined him.

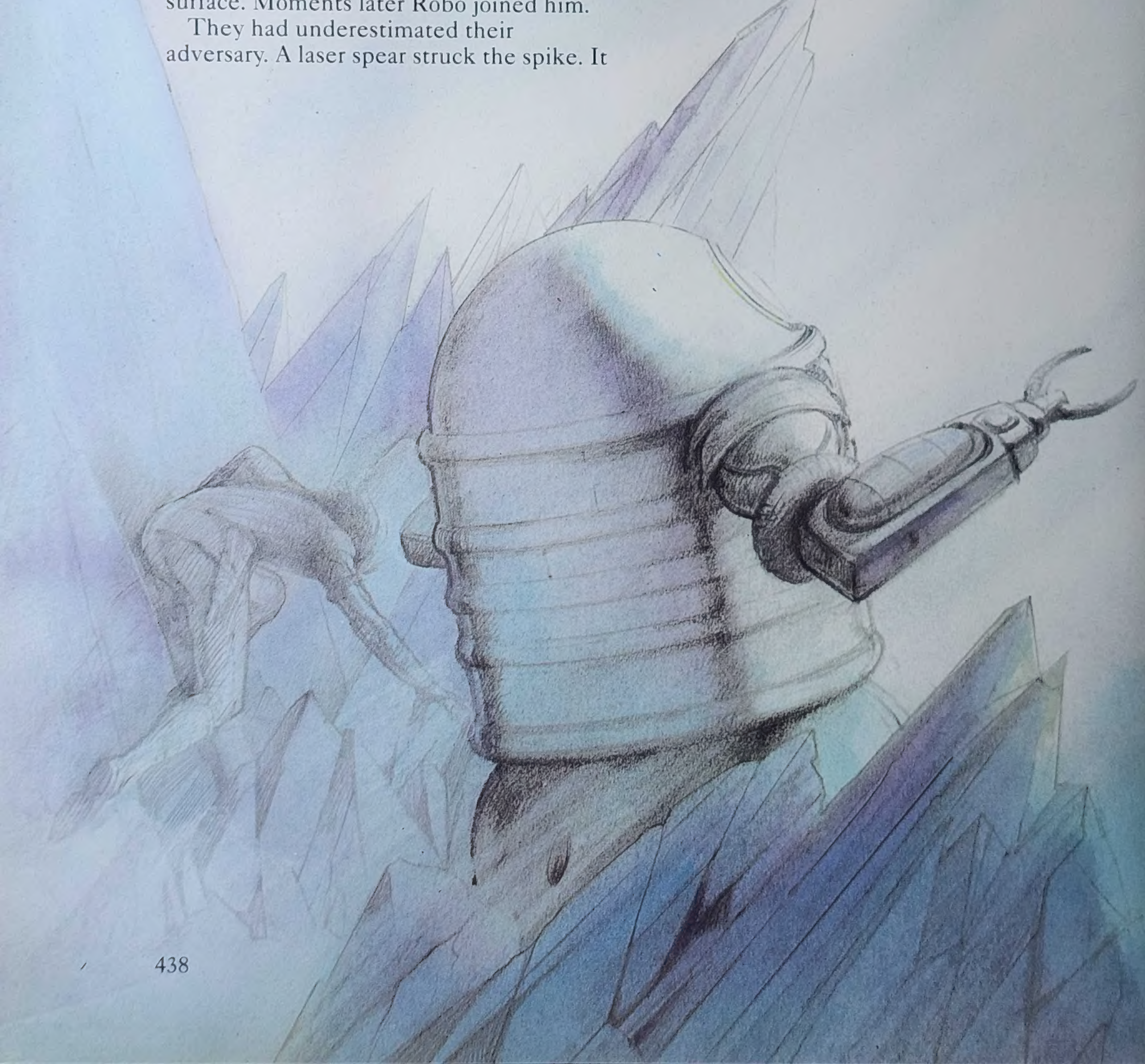
They had underestimated their adversary. A laser spear struck the spike. It exploded in a cloud of black dust. Richard forced himself to remain still. It was then that he remembered the message on the binary panel.

"Is there any part of you that can be used to reflect the laser spears?" he called to Robo.

"Affirmative," the robot replied.

In the blink of an eye Robo moved directly in front of their tormentor.

Immediately, more laser spears arrowed towards him. Robo's destruction seemed imminent. Then something totally unexpected happened.



Instead of reducing Robo to a pile of useless scrap, the laser beam bounced off the robot. Somehow Robo had transformed part of his metallic head into a mirror panel. The deadly spears of laser light that had been aimed at Robo were now heading in the direction of Zenon.

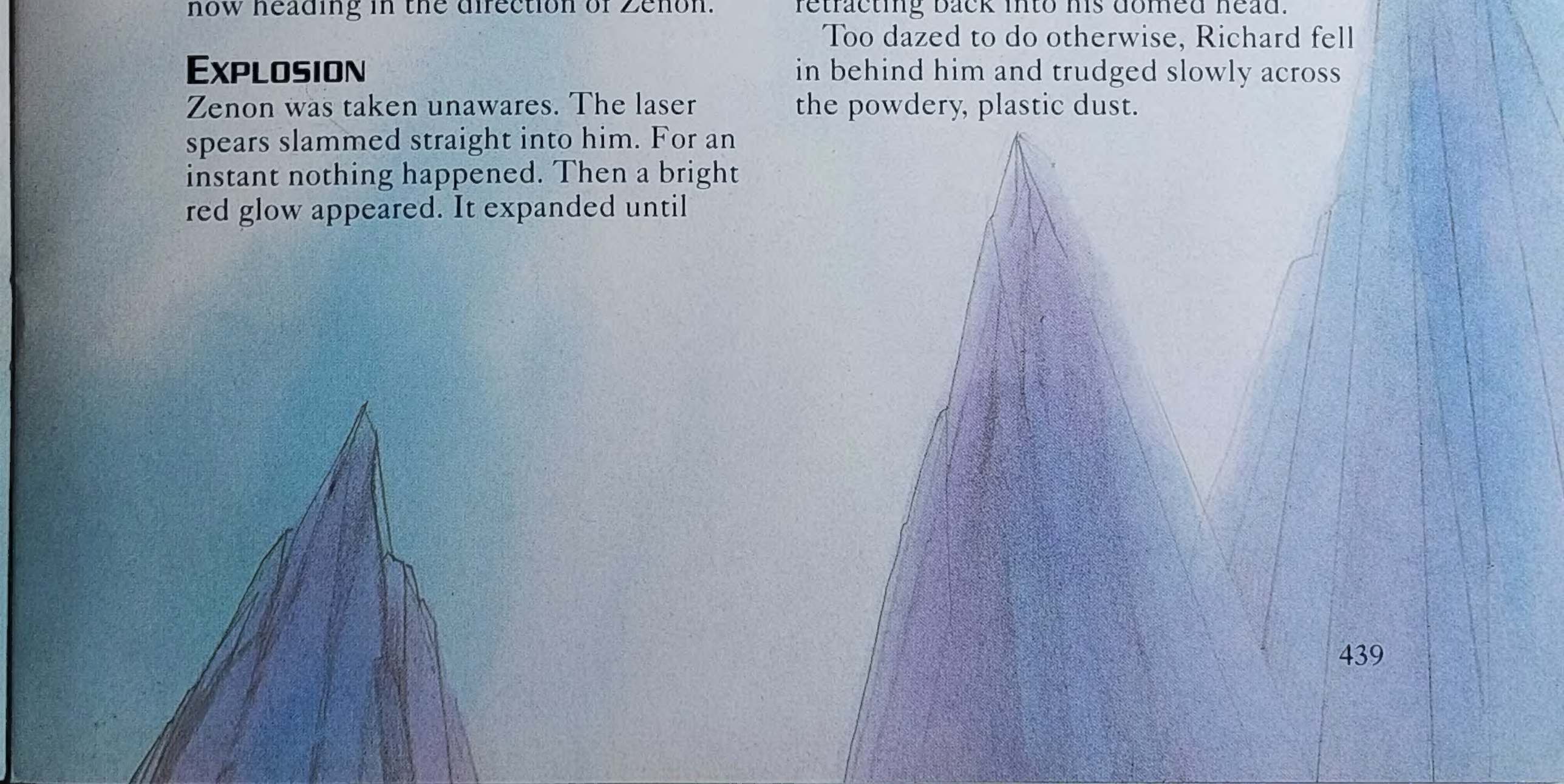
EXPLOSION

Zenon was taken unawares. The laser spears slammed straight into him. For an instant nothing happened. Then a bright red glow appeared. It expanded until Zenon became a fluorescent fireball. Richard felt his hair start to singe. Then, suddenly, Zenon imploded. The fireball shrunk to a blinding white dot that hung in the air before vanishing completely.

Richard looked towards Robo. "It was lucky you had the mirror," he gasped.

"We move on," the robot said in his flat metallic voice, the mirror panel already retracting back into his domed head.

Too dazed to do otherwise, Richard fell in behind him and trudged slowly across the powdery, plastic dust.



Soon the dour terrain petered out, giving way to a land that was fractured like an enormous jigsaw puzzle. It was as if the ground had been dried out under a red hot sun.

Suddenly, there was a rumbling noise and the cracks in the distance began to widen and spread. Robo computed rapidly, gauging the possible threat.

"Jump to your right!" he instructed.

PULLED UNDERGROUND

Richard was too slow. The cracks sped across the earth at an incredible speed. The ground opened into a black crevasse. Richard teetered on its edge, then he fell.

There was an impression of endless darkness beneath him before his fingers locked around a stone which projected from the side of the chasm. In the gloom Richard could feel the ground shift as it continued to widen. He clung onto the stone with all his might.

"Help!" he shouted. Richard's cry was drowned in the continual thundering of the earthquake. As the ground began to tilt outwards, he repeated his cry once more. Richard broke into a cold sweat – he was losing his grip!

Richard had all but given up hope when a metal hand telescoped down and grasped his wrist. It was Robo. Richard felt himself being hauled up to safety.

Hovering above the crevasse, the robot pulled Richard up and deposited him onto flat ground. The earthquake ceased.

Richard stood up and looked around him. He had expected to see a ruined and impassable landscape. To his surprise, everything was much as it had been – a random web of narrow cracks. His feelings of apprehension grew stronger.

Sea of metal

Richard and Robo set off across the jigsaw terrain. This time, however, Richard was very careful about stepping over the cracks. He was relieved when they eventually dwindled away, to be replaced by a featureless vista of plain, flat rocks.

In the distance Richard could see a strange silver-coloured shape. As they walked, it grew bigger until Richard finally realized that he was looking at a vast ocean composed of molten metal. He went to investigate.

"Warning!" Robo said. "Ocean is comprised of mercury. Lethally poisonous to all carbon-based organisms ."

Richard looked curiously at the silver lake and shuddered, lost in his thoughts.

When he eventually turned to face his companion, to his horror he found he was standing alone on the cliff top. Robo was nowhere in sight.

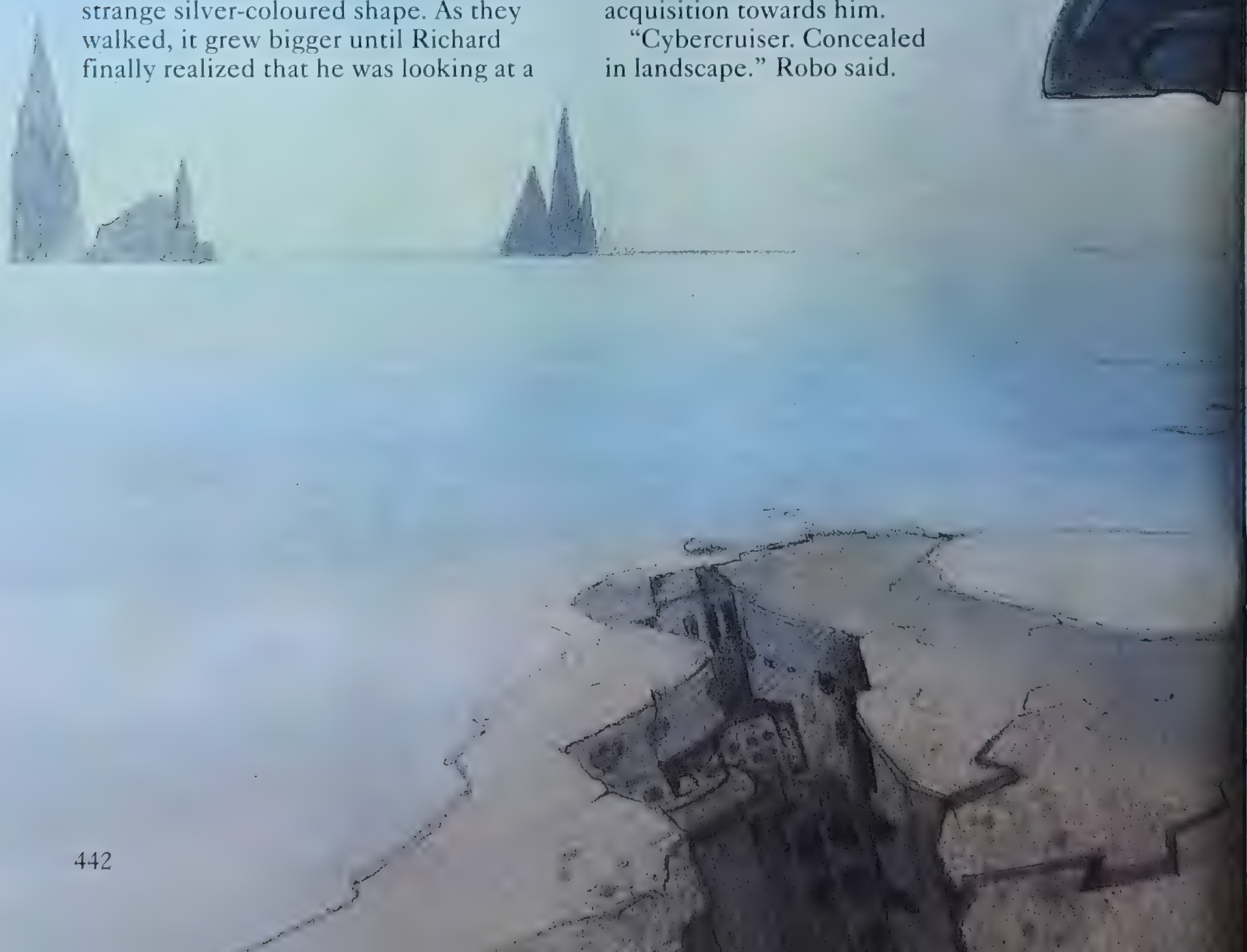
"Robo! Where are you?" Richard yelled as he looked around frantically.

It was the second time that Robo had mysteriously disappeared. Richard looked around in vain for any trace of the robot.

"Robo! Robo!" he called.

Instead of a reply, he heard a low hum. He looked up and saw Robo riding a sleek metal machine that glided through the air. He waited as the robot steered the new acquisition towards him.

"Cybercruiser. Concealed in landscape." Robo said.



Landing the craft beside Richard, the robot turned to him. "To speed up travel." Robo said. "Familiarize yourself with cybercruiser controls."

Richard looked in delight at the machine. It had a curved faring, foot bars, a neat joystick control, a comfortable driver's seat and a perch at the rear to carry Robo. In front of the driver lay a console studded with an array of buttons. Robo gave him a quick run-down of their various functions and Richard soon felt capable of driving the machine.

"Can I take it for a test run?" he asked.

"Affirmative. Use safety visor first." Robo said, gesturing at a shiny helmet that was placed near to the driver's seat.

JOYRIDE

Richard climbed aboard and settled himself astride the seat. It was a little wide but at the touch of a button it shrank to a comfortable width. Richard pressed another button and a backrest rose up to nestle firmly behind his shoulder blades. He punched the ignition and the cybercruiser lifted soundlessly into the air. He slid his thumb over a small lever on the joystick and pressed gently downwards. The cybercruiser moved slowly forwards. He slid the lever back and the machine moved backwards. He turned the handles and the machine carved a delicate arc through the air.

"This is great!" Richard shouted. "It's like a magic carpet crossed with a Harley-Davison motorbike."

Robo looked at him blankly, his internal circuits whirring frantically.

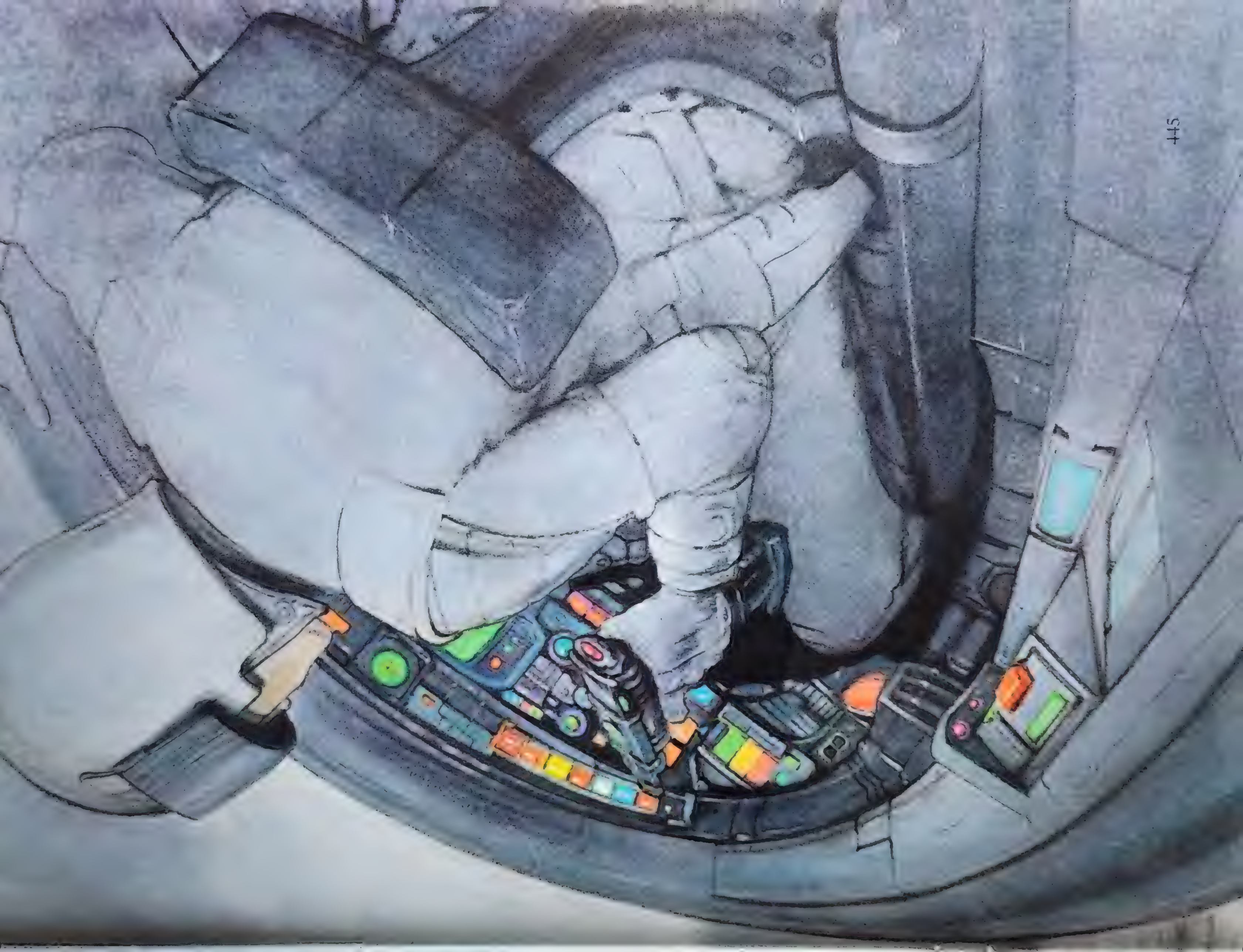
"Magicarpet and harleydavison organisms unknown," he said eventually. "Further data required."

"Forget it," Richard laughed. "I'm going to see what this thing can do."

He pressed down the throttle and raced through the air. Behind him came Robo, doing his best to keep pace.

The cybercruiser was amazing. At the touch of a button it could jump to an incredible height. A further touch and it could drop instantly to the ground. Pulling back the joystick increased the speed to a frightening rate.

"Mega!" Richard exclaimed.



In no time at all, Richard was flying gracefully over the mercury ocean. It was the first time since his appearance in the Cyber Dimension that he was actually enjoying himself. Perhaps there was something to be said for this world after all! Flushed with adrenaline, Richard banked tightly to make the return journey.

He was overconfident. Richard had forgotten to release the throttle before entering the curve. The cybercruiser tilted, then swung upside down as its internal gyro failed to cope with the impossible demands placed upon it.

Out of control

Richard felt himself sliding off. He clung tightly to the handlebars but his weight made the cybercruiser veer ever more erratically. It slipped and lurched in the

air. Then, as its self-levelling mechanism asserted itself, it pivoted sharply. Richard lost his grip and dropped into the mercury.

It felt like he had been plunged into a bucket of icy mud. The mercury was cold and smooth. It was also deadly poisonous. Richard's initial terror dissolved as he realized his armour and visor would protect him from the mercury.

As the icy sea of metal established its hold, Richard knew it was only a matter of time before he sank down. A sudden thought struck him – if the mercury was not hot, then what was making it swirl and bubble? He looked around for Robo, but he was nowhere to be seen. The robot had been left behind while Richard went joy-riding on the cybercruiser.

Richard raised his eyes and saw his machine floating idly over the mercury. It was only just above him, but the distance may as well have been an eternity. There was no way he could reach it. He cursed his own stupidity.

Richard realized that any struggle was useless – he would only be pulled down further into the mercury. He forced himself to remain still, hoping that Robo would rescue him before it was too late.

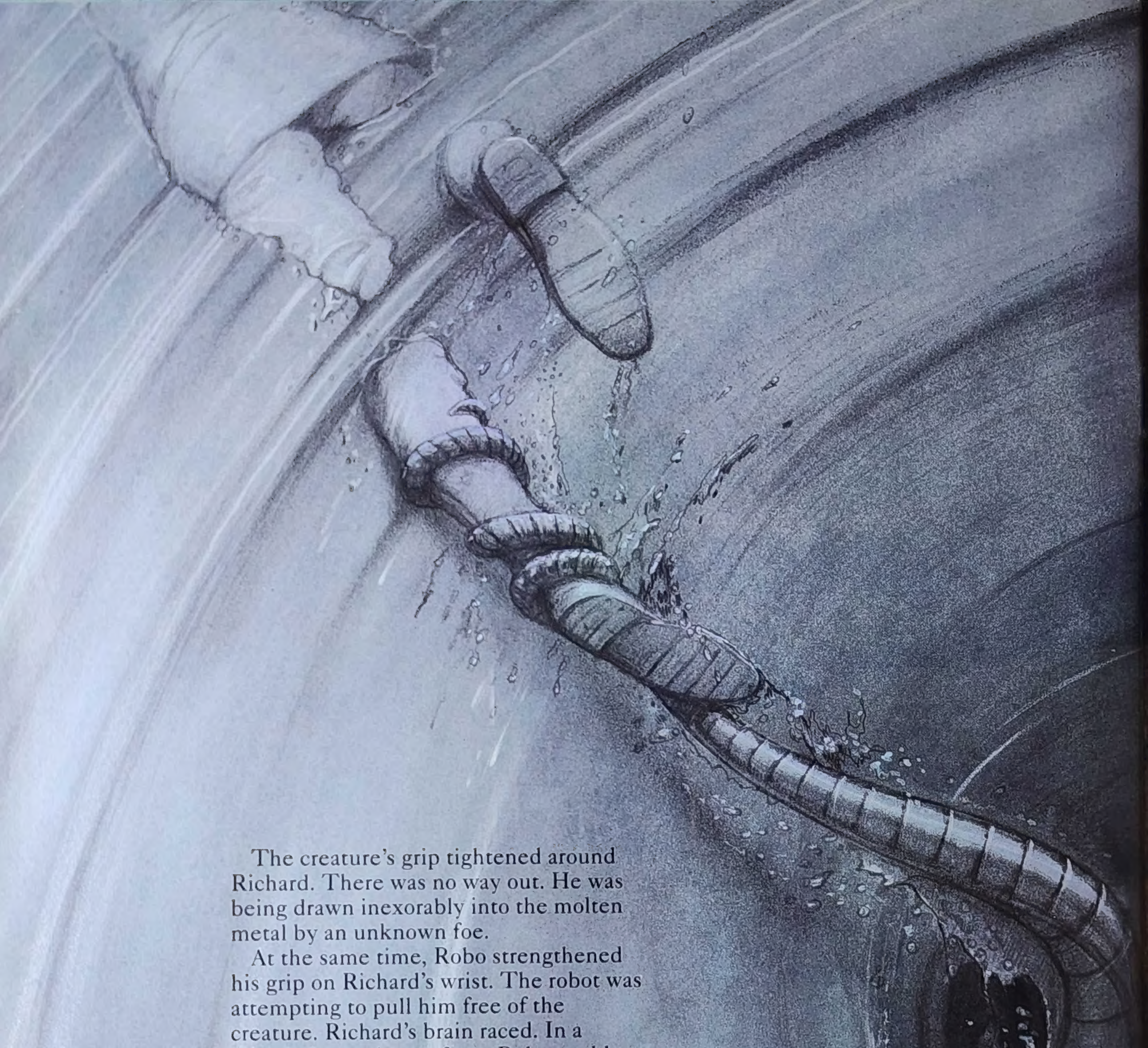
Rescue arrives

He was up to his armpits by the time the robot finally arrived. Richard waved a hand and as he did so the other arm slipped beneath the surface. The poisonous metal lapped against his armour.

Robo hovered above the sea of mercury and, for the second time that day, shot out an arm to grab Richard's wrist.

The silver liquid silently released Richard. Above, he could hear the whine of Robo's power source as the robot struggled to hoist his load. As he came free, Richard shook himself to release the last few globules of mercury. They fell into the pool below with a gentle splash. He was saved. Or was he?

Richard's feet were dangling only inches above the surface when there suddenly came a commotion from deep within the sea of mercury. Whirlpools surged and deepened. The molten metal parted and a silvery metal tentacle shot up and wrapped itself around Richard's leg.



The creature's grip tightened around Richard. There was no way out. He was being drawn inexorably into the molten metal by an unknown foe.

At the same time, Robo strengthened his grip on Richard's wrist. The robot was attempting to pull him free of the creature. Richard's brain raced. In a straightforward tug-of-war Robo could not hope to match the strength of his captor.

Into the deep

The only hope was for Richard to let go and give Robo the chance to use his heat ray. With a grunt, Richard twisted his wrist out of Robo's grasp. Unexpectedly free of his burden, the robot, span wildly through the air. Richard shuddered as the hidden being dragged him into the molten sea.

SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

Complete with their robo-suits, Richard's elusive little friends are still following his every move. They are hidden away somewhere in this issue.

Only a keen eye can spot them.

In issue 27 Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 416

▶ Computer Challenge

Another vitally important computer component from the sinister *Cyber Dimension* has been hidden in this issue. Help Richard and Robo locate it in less than three minutes.

When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?

In last week's issue a computer SIMM card was hidden inside Tengam on Page 427

SIMM (Single Inline Memory Module) cards are used by some computers to store RAM (Read Only Memory). RAM is temporary memory that is used when a computer performs tasks such as opening up a programme or making a calculation.

▶ Techscan Q&A cards

With a friend, test your scientific knowledge by taking turns to ask each other questions from the Techscan cards. In all, there are 36 techscan cards to collect. In future issues we will show you a variety of games that can be played with them.

▶ Cyber Power cards

There are 54 Cyber Power cards to collect. Each card features a character from Richard's adventures in the Cyber Dimension. Carefully cut out the cards and collect them. In later issues they can be used to play many interesting and varied games.

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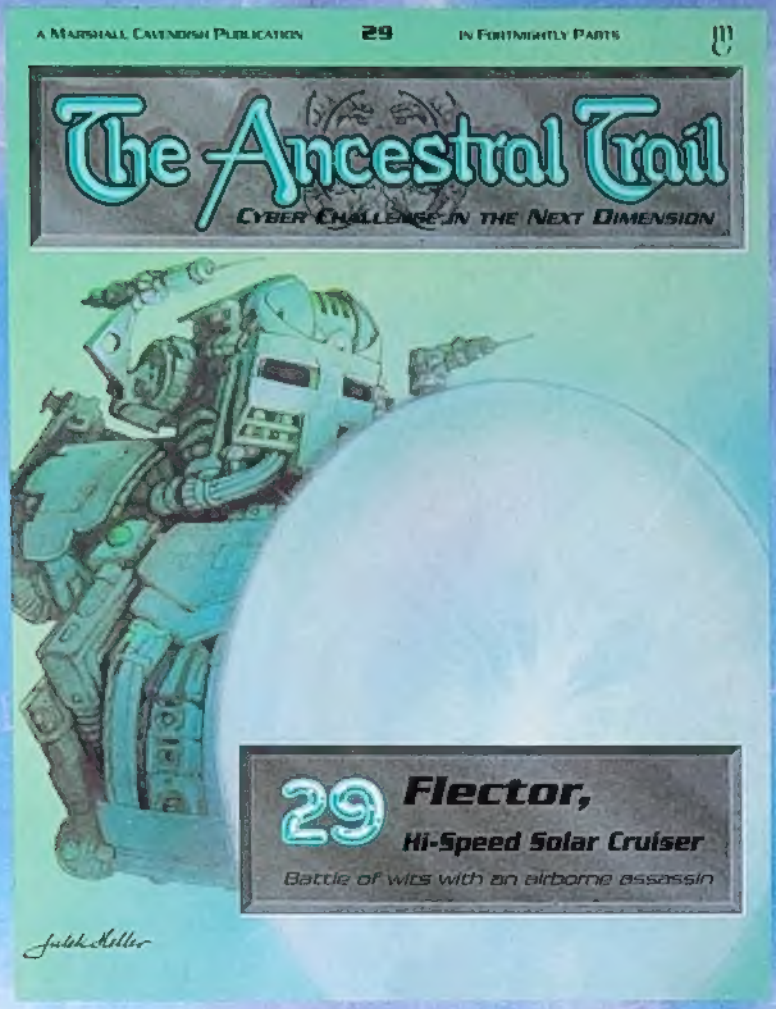

In Issue 29

Flector, Solar Cruiser

Richard's adventures continue as he meets an invincible adversary that is able to absorb any power. With Robo at his side, Richard also encounters the sinister Pekods.

plus

- Specially designed **Techscan** cards folder for you to cut out and create.

Coming in Issue 30

Mortex, Molten Trail-Blazer

Deep underground, Richard is stranded in the citadel of fire. Can he find a way out and avoid being roasted alive?

plus

2 more **Techscan** cards ▶ 2 more **Cyber Power** cards ▶ Playing boards for **Mainframe Control** and **Cyber Chess**.

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